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December 1918

Ruth _____

I'm giving people _____
things I like _____, not
things they may want
but I know _____
will be good for
your sweet soul.

JAL.

SONGS TO SAVE A SOUL



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Songs to Save a Soul

BY

IRENE RUTHERFORD McLEOD



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A NUMBER of these poems have appeared in the *Nation*, the *Smart Set*, *Votes for Women*, and the *New Weekly*, and it is by courtesy of the editors of those journals that they are reproduced here.—I. R. M.

*Who will buy songs to save a human soul ?
That's all I have to sell—
Songs, chiming words, to pay the devil's toll,
And slam the gates on hell.
Love will not save him now, nor spirit grace,
Nor hope that suckles doubt ;
I have seen hunger staring on his face
And all his flame gone out.
I dare not comfort him : my childish tongue
Gabbles too conscious lies ;
It is too long ago our faith was young
And vision blurred our eyes.
That's done with—but by God, it's funny too !
Here I stand, youth
In my flesh, song in my passionate brain, too true
To sell what's his—but truth
Sniggering always . . . put aside your pen,
Poor fool, flesh they will buy,
But songs go cheaply in a world of men
And Christ they crucify !*

Soft Places

HERE I lie on a feather bed,
With a feather pillow beneath my
head,

From my feet up to my chin
I feel my body sinking in;
And though I writhe and turn about
I cannot lift my spirit out.

In the gloom without a sound
The hosts of life are pressing round.

When I go out in crowded places
I cannot breathe for all the faces,
All the lips and all the eyes,
All that lives from all that dies,

All the passion of groping hands
That search the dusk for holy lands.

In the gloom without a sound
The hosts of life are pressing round.

There is that I dare not know
Haunts the crowded ways I go ;
There is that in every street
Tunnels hell beneath my feet ;
There are depths I dare not see,
And only *noise* 'twixt them and me.

In the gloom without a sound
The hosts of life are pressing round.

And though I rend my flimsy bars
And thrust my head among the stars,
I dare not look upon my God,
But rather choose to be a clod.
I am not fashioned to endure
The flame that burns the spirit pure.

In the gloom without a sound
The hosts of life are pressing round.

And so I lie on a feather bed,
With a feather pillow beneath my head,
And sleep sits heavy on my chest,
And I am weary of much rest.
But though I writhe and turn about,
I cannot lift my spirit out.

In the gloom without a sound
The hosts of life are pressing round.

Unborn

LITTLE body I would hold,
Little feet my hands enfold,
Little head my tears have blessed,
Little mouth that seeks my breast,
Little shining soul that cries
From the worship of his eyes,
I must wait that I may be
Great enough to mother thee.

MY dear comes down to meet me,
Comes down the little way
Where clover cops are gay,
And smiles from far to greet me
At twilight time of day.

And sun is on his laughter,
And light is on his hands,
Like dust from stranger lands,
And shining birds trail after,
Where my belovèd stands.

My dear comes down to find me
Beyond the bolted door,
But we shall touch no more,
And sunset dies behind me,
And life is stretched before.

18 My Dear comes down . . .

Yet still he comes to meet me,

Comes down the little way

Where clover cops are gay,

And still he smiles to greet me

At twilight time of day.

Song from "April"

I KNOW

Where the wind flowers blow !

I know,

I have been

Where the wild honey bees

Gather honey for their queen !

I would be

A wild flower,

Blue sky over me,

For an hour . . . an hour !

So the wild bees

Should seek and discover me,

And kiss me . . . kiss me . . . kiss me !

Not one of the dusky dears should
miss me !

Song from "April"

I know

Where the wind flowers blow !

I know,

I have been

Where the little rabbits run

In the warm, yellow sun !

Oh, to be a wild flower

For an hour . . . an hour . . .

In the heather !

A bright flower, a wild flower,

Blown by the weather !

I know,

I have been

Where the wild honey bees

Gather honey for their queen !

London

THERE is no town but London town.

I go wandering up and down,
Round and round and round about,
Back and forth, and in and out,
From light to shade, from shade to light,
In the dawn, and through the night,
When sleep scours all her streets of men,
And morning pours them back agen,
I go wandering like a shade,
The loneliest creature God has made,
And yet akin with all the earth,
And all that flesh has brought to birth,
And all I touch and all I see,
Oh, I am that, and that is me !

I love the tramp of human feet,
To feel the world's great pulses beat ;
I love the triumphant roar of strife,
The clashing armaments of life ;
I do not hate the smoke and grime,
The dusky kiss of labouring Time,
For smoke and grime make London grey,
And London white, and London gay,
Would seem to me a painted whore,
And not my London any more.
Oh, when the fog falls like a shroud
And smothers up the human crowd,
And I can only sense and smell
The living things I love so well,
And Death lurks slyly within reach,
And springs to warn men with a screech
And a dull gleam of lampish eyes
That life is short and all flesh dies ;
Then mystery walks at my right hand,
And leads me to a mystic land—

A land of wan and muffled sound,
A land of undiscovered ground,
Where I must walk with silent lips
Beside a river whose dim ships,
Ghost cargoes and faint jewelled, glide
With and against an unseen tide ;
And yellow wasps be-star the air,
And angels stand with wild bright hair,
And men walk nearer to God's throne
Because they find themselves alone.
And when the rain comes silvering down,
Oh, then I love this London town !
When Day has closed her drowsed lids up,
And Night shades life like some dark cup
Whose wine is spilt in golden dreams,
Then are the streets like shining streams,
And I in my battleship of fire
Hiss my mad way, my heart a lyre ;
With delving feet and soaring wings
I am quick to the searching touch of things,

The ruddy arms of men, that gleam
Out of the darkness like a dream
Of fateful power ; the piteous moon,
A fearful spirit come too soon,
Affronted by the storm wind's breath,
Dying a mournful misty death ;
The lamps, those spiders of the night,
Spinning their wavering threads of light
Seeking all heaven and earth to span,
From man to God, and God to man ;
The thunder of a passing train,
Which belches out its hideous pain
Against the howling of the wind,
Streaming its Titan hair behind ;
And then the quiet suburban streets,
Where still the mighty muffled beats
Of London's heart keep time with mine,
And London's distant lamps still shine
Reflected, hovering in the skies,
A burning moth with golden eyes.

Men say I love not London town,
Because I sing of hill and down,
Because I feel the insistent goad
Which drives me out upon the road
To seek the wide eternal green
That washes mind and spirit clean,
And leave the trodden streets behind,
And leap to meet the unfettered wind,
And dance because of budding trees,
And wing my longing to grey seas !
But oh, the dust beneath my feet
Is doubly dear and doubly sweet
That I shall tread it back agen
To London streets and London men !

Child's Prayer

(Spoken and Unspoken.)

NOW I lay me down to sleep,
Mary, is it pain to die ?

May the saints their vigil keep,
In the narrow grave to lie !

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John,
Worms to tangle in my hair !

Bless this bed I lie upon,
And devour my flesh so fair !

Bless my father and my mother,
O, to lie there all alone !

Bless my sister and my brother,
Cold and white as any stone

Bless my friends, and make me good,

Mary mother, let me be

Bless my work and daily food,

Living when I come to thee !

And when I shall come to die

Mary, I beseech thee, save

Holy Father may I lie

Little children from the grave !

Safe from sin against Thy Breast,

Mary ! Mary ! Mary ! Hark !

There eternally to rest.

I am fearful of the dark !

Amen.

The Beloved

I.

MY lover lay beside me, calm and white,
But Sorrow pressed him at his other side,
And loved him through the night,
And would not be denied.

I lay still, apart.

I did not weep because he was not mine,
Nor drag him jealously against my heart,
But thought how Sorrow made a man divine.

II.

Shall I hate life for your pain ?

I do not know.

Sorrow has come with her sword again

To deal her casual-seeming blow,

And another dream lies slain.

But for every dream that dies

A truth comes true,

And when I look in your tired eyes,

I know that Sorrow has chosen you

For the terrible crown of the wise.

III.

Before your pain I am dumb,

My beloved, I *dare* not pity you,

I cannot speak mild words, as others do.

Quite comfortless I come.

Your grief is dignified
Beyond the comfort that trips on the tongue.
Proudly, as women carry their young,
You carry grief in your side.

But lay your hands in my breast,
Lift up your mouth to my mouth, and speak
What others may not hear, be weak,
Lean on my heart, and rest.

Three Women

THREE women sit under a railway arch,
Huddled, shapeless, hideous, grim,
Crouching away in the merciful dim,
Blind and deaf to the year's slow march.

Flesh slow dying, and souls long dead,
Bleared eyes glazing and mouthing jaws,
Shaking, palsied, beseeching paws,
Rain your curses upon my head.

Hearts where raged once consuming flame
Which licked the souls of you deep in hell,
Hate if you can, and hate me well,
Hate me out of your loveless shame.

Hate my flesh that is quick and warm,
Hate my eyes that are clear and young,
Hate my chattering happy tongue,
Hate my limbs and their rounded form.

Hate my soul for aspiring high
O you who have never adored a star,
Who have never wept for the things that are,
Nor shouted joy at a laughing sky.

Could pity quicken your wheezing breath,
Could a kiss bring life I would stoop and give
Even that, for love, if you crave to live,
But I think you wait for the kiss of death.

Vision

HE came far out of the east with a broken song,
And a broken lute in his hands, and in his breast
A broken heart he bore ; he had journeyed long,
But he would not stay, and his eyes looked into the west.

O say from whence you travel and whither you go,
O man with the sleepless eyes, and what your fame?
Whence I forget and whither I do not know,
But I go in search of a dream without a name.

I have builded many a bridge and shattered doors,
I have hewn out many a path with bleeding hands ;
I have sailed in many a ship to foreign shores,
And travelled a lonely road in alien lands.

Seeking, seeking, seeking, I know not what ;
Leaving the milk and the honey of life behind.
On and on, though my weary feet should rot,
Desiring only the thing that I must find.

A pitiless thirst is a scourge to drive me on,
A thirst which the waters of life may not assuage ;
Only there at the end when I have won,
Shall the thirst be quenched and the fire cease to rage.

In the glowing sky that gilds the edge of the world
I have seen a vision hang with the evening star ;
I have heard a voice, I have seen a flag unfurled,
And I must go though the edge of the world be far.

I dream that when I shall come to the place of light
I shall find a Man hung high on a blazing tree ;
And out of His side shall spring a lily white,
And the crown on His head a crown of stars
shall be.

The stars of dawn and evening shall be His eyes,
From east to west shall spread His flaming wing ;
Beneath His feet the sun and the moon shall rise,
And lifting up His head, His lips shall sing.

And the song of the radiant lips shall end my quest
The lily's song, and the morning and evening star
The vision calls, and I may not stay to rest.
I must learn the song though the edge of the
world be far.

WHEN my beloved sleeping lies
I cannot look at him for tears,
Such mournful peace is on his eyes.

A look of lonely death he wears,
And graven very calm and deep
Lie all the sorrows of old years.

He is so passionless in sleep,
With all his strength relaxed to rest ;
I cannot see him and not weep.

For weakness life has not confessed
And shadowed scars of old mistakes,
I take his head upon my breast,
And hold my dearest till he wakes.

Philosophy

PLEASURE has ceased to please ;
I seek Philosophy.

Joyless and weak I creep
Between her giant knees ;
She bends her gaze on me,
Calm and deep.

I am infinitely small
Between her cool white hands
Under her passionless eyes ;
Forgotten now is the call
Of the undiscovered lands.
I may not rise.

Once with the stream I surged,
Tossed madly here and there,
Battered on rocks of pain,
Lifted high, and submerged,
Frenzied, and bleeding, and bare :
Now I am sane.

Present, and future, and past
Lie at her mighty feet ;
I see them linked in one,
The vision is clear at last
Seen from her lofty seat,
Where I sit in the sun.

I know I must leave her throne,
And go out again into strife,
But her peace is upon my soul ;
I will go forth alone
And pour myself into life,
Into the Whole.

And then if the gods shall please
When I have given my best,
When I am burnt out and spent,
I shall come to her great white knees,
I shall sleep in her quiet breast,
Fulfilled, content.

SWALLOW, swallow, over the green trees,
My heart is a bird of infinite wisdom ;
Wiser than you, my swallow of the azure.
O winterless swallow, what know you of spring ?

Swallow, swallow, I have been there too,
Near the horizon of promise eternal ;
But I have known death, my swallow of green
summer.

O sorrowless sad one, what know you of joy ?

Swallow, swallow, I am not envious.
My wings are not laughter ; I know the beginning.
The last is the first, O swallow of the morning.
O shadowless swift one, what know you of light ?

Swallow, swallow, there is no beginning
That was not the end, and death is the dung-heap
Whence spring the lilies of life everlasting.
O fetterless swallow, what know you of freedom?

OH, that I had full power to be
All that your need requires of me !

I pray for a body fine and fair,
That you may find your pleasure there

I pray for a heart unsmirched of sin
That you may rest your griefs therein.

I pray for a mind alive and clear,
That you may cherish a comrade here.

I pray for a spirit pure as flame,
That you may love me free of shame.

Oh, I must live that I may be
All that your need requires of me !

Unfulfilled

I AM an old woman, and my lips are cold ;
I am an old woman, and my breast is lean ;
I am an old woman, and the bright has gone out
of my eyes.

I live with the things that have been,
My flesh withers and dies,
I am very old.

I am an old woman with a foolish tongue.
I am an old woman, and my wits are gone.
I am an old woman, and my wits are strayed and
wild.

I am become a thing for fun.
I am a withered child,
I am too old and too young.

Oh, to have the spirit when the body is full of
years !

Oh, to hear the echo, and never the song !

Oh, to be old, and not to have age in my ears !

I have plucked at flowers all my days, and
they have died.

The roots were too deep,

The roots were too strong,

The roots were spread too wide

Faith

OH, I have listened to many a honied word,
And smiled because the easy praise seemed
sweet,

And trusted smooth tongues, drinking all I heard,
And sung my songs thereby with heart a-stirred,
And seen my dreams lie crumbled at my feet.

But one there was spoke no soft word to me,
In spite of all I had to give of love,
But smiled, and looked a little wistfully,
And shook her gentle head regretfully,
And all my songs her stillness could not move.

Oh, just because her sweet lips never lied
I loved the pain, and loved herself the more,
And held my peace, still waiting at her side,
Feeling my love more noble and more wide
'Than any I had known in me before.

All thought in me was deeper and more strong,
And purpose quickened dreams to power and
fire,

A sweeter melody was in my song,
And I was glad who had been sorry long,
And fashioned will from what had been desire.

She never lied to me, my gentle dear !
She never praised me where no praise was due,
But looked at me with eyes most calm and
clear ;

Dispassionate she was, and knew no fear.
She never lied to me ! Her lips are true !

Oh, she was true when truth itself seemed dead,
And now the pain of truth is all retrieved,
For lo, last night she touched my hand, and said,
“I love you,” gently, leaning close her head ;
And I believed ! oh, I believed ! oh, I believed !

Song

HOW do I love you?
I do not know.

Only because of you
Gladly I go.

Only because of you
Labour is sweet,
And all the song of you
Sings in my feet.

Only the thought of you
Trembles and lies
Just where the world begins—
Under my eyes.

Ships

THE rivers splendidly flow
Out to sea,
And noble ships come and go
Statelily
Whither and whence I do not know.

I think the ships are like men
Setting sail for the wide
With their cargoes of thoughts, and then,
With a change of tide
And a newer load, coming back again.

I WILL give you rest,
I will !

I could be calm and still,
If you leaned against my breast.

I had a heart of flame,
I had !
But I could be sober and sad,
I could put out my heart if you came.

I HAVE not forgotten,
My lover, my lover.

When love was conceived, when love was begotten
Of waves and winds and wild skies over !

When hand in hand,
Naked as laughter,
Gulls screaming after,
We raced on the sand,
Fearless and free,

Together, together !

White in the wind as the sea bird's feather,

Our bodies glistened,

Salt with the sea,

And nobody listened, nobody listened !

The songs of our laughter, the shouts of our glee

Ah! Beauty! Beauty! Beauty of bodies!

Never before

Had I seen the temple whole where God is!

I have not forgotten awe and pride

As we stilled to adore,

Cheek to cheek and side to side.

Then—do you forget?—

Through gates of flesh let slip,

Our spirits met,

Trembled once where lip found lip.

And up! Up! Up!

Loosened arrows of light!

We drained the cup

Of the infinite!

We were the first and the last!

Time, and Eternity,

Present, and future, and past

Thundered in you and me,

Singing! Singing! Singing!

While, far beneath,

Your breath mixed with my breath,

Our human lips still clinging. . .

Ah . . . They will take us,

Bleed us, break us,

Shackle and smother,

And leave us stark !

They call it living,

Clutching and striving,

Tearing each other,

Crushed in the dark . . .

But hush . . . can you hear me . . .

My lover . . . my lover . . .

Keep always near me. . .

It is not forgotten.

Love conceived, and love begotten

Of waves, and winds, and wild skies over. . .

Song

O WATER may kiss thy small young feet,
Thy feet are very fair and sweet.

O wind may kiss thy lovely cheek,
Thy cheek is very warm and meek.

O sun may kiss thy sinless eyes,
Thine eyes are very clear and wise.

But I am a man who comes to thee,
So keep thy modest mouth for me !

My Glorious One !

VERY beautiful you are to me
My beloved !

All my pride is in you,

As a mother's my pride is,

I am wrapped in majesty

Because of you.

I am familiar with all your aspects,

My lover,

How your head hangs aside

When you are tired,

And your skin is transparent for glory

That burns through,

I have seen you in the morning,

Passionate heart,

Pale dawn on your lips,
Like the wan triumph of death,
And I have jealously melted its radiance
With my warm breath.

Sometimes you tug at my heart
As a child does.
When I see you leap for the stars,
When I see you reach out your hand, laughing,
To pluck the indifferent stars !
Ah, my beautiful,
Then my hands yearn over you,
And I long for the breasts of quiet hills
That I might take you in,
And your bitter sorrow.

Very beautiful you are to me
In all your ways !
But most of all when I dare not see you
Because of your great strength !

My Glorious One ! 57

Most of all when my soul rocks and trembles

Because of your great strength !

Most of all when I am melted up,

And merged in the sun of your being,

And utterly consumed

By the terrible joy of your strength !

Come !

Draw me up for your thirst,

As Apollo gathers the mists !

Come !

Come down upon me

Like a mighty torrent !

I would not be stronger than you are !

Come !

Sweep me like a straw upon your waters

Into most splendid dangers !

Do not let me stand against your tides,

My glorious one !

The Aim

I SHALL walk freely yet
Who am beset
With burrs, and brambles clinging,
And flowers on either hand
Where I stand
Which I pluck, singing,
And my steep road forget.

I shall not roam, nor stay,
Nor weep, nor play
Though beckon tears and laughter.
Dreams and desires may ride
Far and wide,
And bid me follow after,
But I shall go my way.

The little loves that bind
I shall leave behind,
Careless of hate or pleading,
No hand shall stay my feet,
However sweet.
I must go on still speeding
My highest height to find.

Rest

AS a little child I come
To be gathered to your breast
So tired that my lips are dumb,
So sad that my warm heart is numb :
Beloved, let me rest.

Oh, how all the noises die,
All the cruel voices cease,
I can sleep when you are by,
And I am too faint to cry :
Here at last is peace.

Hold me, nurse me, love me . . . so . . .
Almost I could learn to weep !
Hush, I feel my spirit grow . . .
When you tire . . . let me go . . .
I shall be . . . asleep.

I SEE you always through a haze
Like summer heat above the grass,
You go with me in all my ways
And lean towards me as we pass
Along our sad and separate ways.

I remember . . . once we stood
Transfixed in love in Randall's store,
And he was saying . . . *this is good* . . .
While through the creaking parlour door
There came the smells of frying food !

And oranges . . . and stripy sweets . . .
And bathing caps . . . and buzzing flies . . .
And counting my slow pulse's beats . . .
And through the dancing haze your eyes !
While Randall pressed his potted meats.

Looking Back

WHEN I was young a dream I dreamed .
I saw my splendid God denied,
I saw my young Christ crucified,
And I was on the Cross it seemed.

I stood within the Cross's shade,
I shrank beside Him in the dim,
And He was me, and I was Him,
And I was very sore afraid.

I looked into His eyes and wept,
I held His hands and wept again,
For He was mine, His pride, His pain ;
They crucified Him while I slept.

When I awoke and saw Him there,
My dear young Christ all crucified,
I cursed, and bitterly I cried,
Because He was so young and fair.

I lifted up my hands and railed,
I clasped His feet, but they were cold,
And I was suddenly grown old,
An old, old child that cursed and wailed.

My shivering flesh was cold as sod,
I waited very anxiously
Lest they should take that earthly me
And hang it up beside my God.

But He His clear gaze opened wide,
And hung aside His anguished head;
“I am enough, my child,” He said,
“And they perhaps are satisfied.”

And then I knew that this was *Me*
With bleeding hands, and feet, and brow,
That all my Christ was murdered now,
And I, asleep, had let it be.

I cried aloud for nails and Cross,
I craved the scourge, I craved the spear,
My soul-less body knew no fear
In that undying sense of loss.

But now—myself is satisfied,
I feed my flesh where it is weak,
And I am old, and warm, and sleek,
For only Christ was crucified.

I Walk My Ways

I WALK my ways with poetry in my heart,
Nor heed the fevered hurry of the throng.
In life's activities I find no part,
But tread the highways with a silent song.
I have no traffic in the worldly mart,
I know no certainties of right and wrong,
But shape my fleeting dreams to forms of art,
Knowing that life is short and art is long.

And who shall say I do not play my rôle
Because I do not clamour in the street,
Nor raise my hand to swell the frenzied strife,
But rather chose with song to worship life,
And feed the flickering flame within my soul,
And silent stand because the stars are sweet?

Upon a Truss of Hay

MY love and I were seated
Upon a truss of hay,
From all the world retreated,
And from the blaze of day.

We heard the horses champing
Near by us where we lay
To rest us from our tramping
The white and dusty way.

Said I then to my lover,
“Dear heart, what shall men say
If they perchance discover
Where we are hid away?”

Said he, "O love, I'm reckless,
Let happen now what may,
We will be fond and feckless
While we've a time for play."

"Look long upon me, dearest,
With gallant eyes and grey."
"O now your soul shines clearest,
And all the rest is clay."

"Give me your hands for holding,
And quiet let them stay."
"Your hands my hands enfolding
Inclines my heart to pray."

And so we sat, not moving,
Upon a truss of hay,
With nought to do but loving
Throughout a summer day.

A Day

SHALL you ever forget that horizon's luminous line

Where the mist-hazed curve of the hill met the sunless sky,

And the furrowed field where two white birds wheeled high,

And the smell of the rain-washed earth, and the smell of pine?

Or the soft damp wind blowing love all over the earth,

And the space in the gorse where we sat ourselves down and talked,

And the little copse where you sang aloud as you walked,

And I rolled in the dear dead leaves in a rapture of mirth?

Or the straight Scotch firs, and the light between
trunk and trunk,
And the moment you gripped my hand, and no
leaf stirred,
And I loved you because you could speak no
worshipping word,
But stood, wide-eyed and silent, beauty drunk.

And the farmhouse painted black, and the almond
tree,
In delicate pale relief on the gloomy wall,
The evening mist, and the peewits keening call,
. . . And the dusk that ended the day for you
and me.

For Cathleen Nesbitt.

Mother to Son

BEFORE I knew the love of man
The lovely dream of you began.
When I said "Jesus meek and mild"
My Jesus was a little child.
I nursed the kitten on my knee,
And nursed you where no eye could see.
When I grew up to woman's grace
I saw you in your father's face,
Your hands were beating at my breast,
And gave my womanhood no rest,
Your little soul called each to each,
And laid bright heaven in our reach.
My body fed your body, son,
But birth's a swift thing, swiftly done,

Compared to one-and-twenty years
Of feeding you with spirit's tears.
I could not make your mind and soul,
But my glad hands have kept you whole,
And tears have kept God's pastures green,
And washed the temple sweet and clean.
Think you that I have lived in vain
These years of wonder, joy, and pain?
The years when Jesus meek and mild
Was my beloved little child!
And when the first shy touch of things
Waked in my heart a thousand springs,
And bade me open childhood's gate
And give my woman's hand to fate!
The moment when your groping hands
Bound me to life with ruthless bands,
When all my living became a prayer,
And all my days built up a stair
For your young feet that trod behind,
That you an aspiring way should find!

Think you that life can give you pain,
Which does not stab in me again ?
Think you that life can give you pleasure
Which is not my undying treasure ?
Think you that life can give you shame
Which does not make my pride go lame ?
And you can do no evil thing
Which sears not me with poisoned sting.
Because of all that I have done,
Remember me in life, O son !
Keep that proud body fine and fair,
My love is monumented there.
For my love make no woman weep,
For my love hold no woman cheap,
And see you give no woman scorn
For that dark night when you were born.
Beloved, all my years belong
To you, go thread them for a song.

Discovery

IN the grey gloom
I see your startled eyes
Staring in half anticipate surprise
Across the room.

Long ago
You spoke . . . I think you said
It would be fine . . . the sun had set in red . . .
Dull and slow.

A pulse beats
And, surging to its thud,
Painfully ebbs and flows my singing blood,
In colds, and heats.

Suddenly

The little carpeted space

Between us widens . . . and I see your face

Across infinity.

Immaturity

I SAW the delicate profile of her face,
And the soft silhouette of her young grace,
The quaint delicious roundness of her head,
Her silver paleness, save where the lips flashed red,
Parted to let her untragic treble through
Sweet with the lack of pain she never knew.

And seeing her, so virginally fair,
I felt the passion of a most vain prayer,
That the faint petals of this bright white rose
Remain forever so, and not unclosed,
Lest when the lovely leaves are all unfurled
I find a maggot in its deep heart curled.

I HAVE done you greater wrong
Than you had done
Had you lifted your hand to hush my song,
And put out my morning sun.

You, who have reached so high,
To be forced so low !
Down to the dust of a little lie
Lest my heart were too small to know

All of your innocent need,
To stand above
Jealousy, fear, possession's greed,
Not grown enough in love !

There is no sin more than this
From soul to soul !
But perhaps, being you, you will stoop, and kiss,
Forgive, and make me whole.

Wild Weather

OUTSIDE is the storm,
But I lie snug and warm,
Listening to the rain
And the wind's hideous pain ;
Thinking of the hosts
Of drenched misty ghosts,
Blown hither and thither
In the wild sorrowful weather.
I think of the load
Of lonely ones trudging the road,
And I whisper a word
To Christ Jesus our Lord
To show them a place,
By His dear pitiful grace,
Where they may pitch—
A hedge, or a dry ditch.

On a Hill

SPRING on a wind-swept hill !
The grass at our feet
Sheered into waves of light !
Spring, and the woodbird's trill !
Spring, and the stars of night
Turned dewdrops glist'ning sweet
Earth chained we stand,
Thinking unearthly things,
Looking across the land,
Over the hills, beyond the sea,
Our souls on tireless wings
Soaring Eternity.

Spring ! O the wind's rush
In the joyous trees !

O wide, free sky, and white
Laughing clouds ! And the hush
When, as a musician's might,
God's Hand rests on His keys.

For S. Le Mesurier.

SO beautiful you are indeed
That I am troubled when you come,
And though I crave you for my need,
Your nearness strikes me blind and dumb.

And when you bring your lips to mine
My spirit trembles and escapes,
And you and I are turned divine,
Bereft of our familiar shapes.

And fearfully we tread cold space,
Naked of flesh and winged with flame,
. . . Until we find us face to face,
Each calling on the other's name !

Magic

WIND on before me, dim white road,
My feet are glad, they may not tire,
They lift me to a lilting dance,
And love is still my only load,
And all my heart's a shivering lyre,
That doth my way with song entrance.
I love the little poplar trees
That stand so still and very clear
Against the level evening sky !
I love the faintly fragrant breeze
That lifts my hair, and very dear
The sleepy sparrow's chirping cry !
I love the softly sweeping mist
That whispers up the grassy slope

And folds me in a cool embrace !
And O my soul is beauty kissed !
And O my lips are gay with hope !
And O I lift my happy face
Towards the star that silent gleams,
Low hung in luminous deep blue !
And darkness dear is creeping up,
And all the west is full of dreams,
And every deepest dream is true,
And brimming over is my cup !

For Cathleen Nesbitt.

IS love, then, so simple my dear?
The opening of a door,
And seeing all things clear?
I did not know before.

I had thought it unrest and desire
Soaring only to fall,
Annihilation and fire :
It is not so at all.

I feel no desperate will,
But I think I understand
Many things, as I sit quite still,
With Eternity in my hand.

To Francis Thompson

SINGER, thou hast been since long dead,
And all the praise men left unsaid
Now stars thy ghostly head.

Fame stoops to kiss thy heedless feet,
Thy singing seems more subtly sweet
Heard from thy heavenly seat !

And I the lifeless pages turn
Wherein thy living visions burn,
And passionately learn.

Lo, the same quenchless thirst was thine
Which is so mercilessly mine,
Which no words may define,

And which no waters may assuage
From eager youth to passionless age :
O bird, free of thy cage.

What is the end of this wild quest
That gives the rebel soul no rest
And knows not its own best ?

Hast thou attained thy holy star
Which shone so unattainèd far
Across the things that are ?

And dost thou sound a lovelier lyre
Beneath thy unfettered wings of fire,
Freed of all vain desire ?

O deathless singer, look back to me
And know that I in life like thee
Swim in a bitter sea.

Only like thee I cannot sing
Who mad'st of pain a mystic thing,
A blazing plume in thy wing.

Seeing my golden vision unfurled,
I remember not the ways of the world,
And the worm in my flesh curled.

Listening a song across the din
I forget the abyss of fear and sin
Until I stumble in.

But through thee I may not forget
This flesh is but a dusty net
I shall rend yet!

Faith

UNDER the apple-tree,
—Dawn in his eyes,—
White blossom is falling,
Starring his ways.
He looks through the branches,
Spring on his lips,
Laughing.

Under the apple-tree,
—Summer is old,—
He gathers fulfilment,
He holds in his hand
Fruit of fair blossom,
Worms at its heart
Creeping.

Under the apple-tree,
—Death in his hand—

He is not weeping,
He stands and waits.

White blossom! White blossom
Spring in his heart,
Eternal.

Lone Dog

I'M a lean dog, a keen dog, a wild dog, and
lone ;

I'm a rough dog, a tough dog, hunting on my
own ;

I'm a bad dog, a mad dog, teasing silly sheep ;

I love to sit and bay the moon, to keep fat souls
from sleep.

I'll never be a lap dog, licking dirty feet,

A sleek dog, a meek dog, cringing for my meat,

Not for me the fireside, the well-filled plate,

But shut door, and sharp stone, and cuff, and
kick, and hate.

Not for me the other dogs, running by my side,
Some have run a short while, but none of them
would bide.

O mine is still the lone trail, the hard trail, the
best,
Wide wind, and wild stars, and the hunger of the
quest !

I THINK when we have lived our fill
We were not always doing things,
Our moving moments were most still,
And soared on quiet wings.

Often I'm back on Arishmel,
Where only birds and lovers pass,
And sit for hours in lonely spell
With wind upon the grass.

Those glinting gulls above the plough
Still drift unbroken lulls of air.
There is no time, I know it now,
Nor any here, and there.

Sonnet

I LOVE this quiet night, no stars, no moon,
Nature is robed in velvet, common things
Are turned mysterious, divine, there sings
In some far tree the nightingale (soon
I must fall to sleep) some murmuring pigeons
croon

Low above me. Ah, what peace night brings
To tired hearts, so softly her cool wings
She folds about them ! The summer's blazing noon
Is now forgotten. So . . . a long, long day
Slips past, less real than a dream ; I lie
Alone, and silent, and yet not alone,
For you are here—I feel you ! We have flown
Together to the heart of night . . . away . . .
Two stars have risen in the quiet sky.

WHEN you have ceased to love me do not
weep ;

Oh, do not pity me, whose passionate pride
Has never known the comfort of soft tears ;
When you are gone, know that I shall not creep
Into the grey, sad silences to hide,
But set my face towards the unknown years.

When you have ceased to love, do not regret
For my sake what is my eternal gain ;
Mine is the treasure, yours the withered loss ;
My day is deathless, though your sun must set ;
Mine is the exaltation of proud pain—
I never wore my sorrows as a cross.

94 When you have ceased . . .

When you have ceased to love me, go your ways,
Seeking for love from other lips than mine ;
Those fresh lips shall seem stale with memories,
Mine the infinities of these unshadowed days.
I am the temple—I am Love's holy shrine !
Men shall find always laughter in my eyes.

The Sword

C*HRIST is born in Bethlehem !
A crown of thorns His diadem !*

Out of the frail is born the strong,
Out of the pain is born the song,
Out of the dream is born the fight,
Out of our love is born our might.
Into our hearts such love is poured
That each of us is turned a sword,
A sword whose pity knows no ruth,
A sword whose passionate cause is Truth,
A sword which cleaves the blackest night,
And leaves behind its trail of light,

And smites its enemies to earth
That Christ once more may come to birth.

Christ is born in Bethlehem !

A crown of thorns His diadem !

O all ye men who Him adore,
In His hand a sword He bore !
Little laws of men He broke,
Flaming words of scorn He spoke.
He shattered creeds, and priests, and powers
And in their ashes sowed His flowers,
And, hand in hand with two or three,
He preached God's gospel of the free !

Ring out the old, ring in the young,
Hail to the flower so swiftly sprung !
Hail to the wind that blasts the world !
Hail to our flag, by the wind unfurled !
Ring in the eternal truth reborn !
Sing the song of the crown of thorn,

Out into battle unafraid !

Sing the song of the burning blade !

Christ is born in Bethlehem !

A crown of thorns His diadem !

Mary's Baby

LIGHT came forth from Mary's womb,
Christ was born in Mary's pain ;
Mary anguished, Christ was slain,
Truth ascended from a tomb.

They murdered Jesus on the Cross,
Mary's flesh that Mary bore ;
Hers the bleeding side they tore,
Hers the death, and hers the loss.

God is not by flesh confined
God was never crucified
Only Mary's Baby died
For the hope of humankind.

I'LL sit no more and weep apart
To see them crack my true friend's heart
I know them, creeping in the dim
To get a coward's lunge at him,
Creeping, crawling, devil's lice,
Fed on blood of sacrifice,
Glutting on his spirit's store,
Thief and hypocrite, and whore !
And then, when you have sucked him dry,
Leave him there to rot and die !
That's the game for swine like you !
You he swore were fine and true,
You he held were saints and sages :
Fit to mark his heart's white pages,
You he eat with, talked with, played with,
Laughed, and cried, and worked, and prayed with,
You ! You've gulled my darling fool,
You scum ! And had him for your tool.

You've fleeced his heart of faith and youth,
And sickened all his thirst for Truth,
And twisted all his vision wry,
Fill Beauty's just a painted lie,
You've laid indifference on his aim,
And linked his honour to your shame,
There isn't much you've left undone—
But O, you can't put out the sun !
Nor grind his godhead under foot !
Nor make his soul your dirty loot !
Love shall burn the poison out,
And put the devil's lice to rout,
And set his foot upon the height,
And fill him up with power and light,
And love shall wipe away the scars,
And lay his hands on dancing stars—
For love is fire, and love is wings,
And love is stronger than all things !

Rebel

SINCE I was a little child
My spirit has been swift and wild,
With pinions flapping hard on fate,
And burnt and blown with love and hate !
I've hated all that's mean and cold,
All that's dusty, tame, and old,
Comfortable lies in books,
Pallid Virtue's sidelong looks,
Fear that gags the jaws of Truth,
Doubt that weights the heels of Youth,
Saints who wash their hands too clean,
And walk where only Saints have been,
And mobs that blabber—Crucify !
On him who fixes heaven too high :

All of these I seek to blast,
Love's hate shall drive me to the last.
Beyond the murk that swallows me
There is an Eye that follows me,
There is an Ear that waits and strains
To catch the echoes of my pains,
There is a Hand outstretched to take
Utmost toll for each mistake :
These Three have stalked me down the years
To mock the passion of my tears.
I fling you scorn, unholy spy !
Though living give my faith the lie,
Though loving clip the wings of Love,
Though men humanity disprove,
Though all my suns and moons go out,
Though tongues of all the ages shout
That only death may not deceive—
I'll not believe ! I'll not believe !
With ardour passionate in my breath
I'll sing my undefeated faith !

O take me, break me, peaceless life !
My soul was born to welcome strife !
O sap my heart of its deep blood,
If blood be Beauty's precious food !
There is no thing I would not give,
There is no hour I dare not live,
There is no hell I'd not explore
To find a hidden heavenly door !
O loveless spy, you wait in vain,
There is no pity in my pain,
If by my living I may prove
Faith and beauty, truth and love !
Twisted, shattered, drained, and wrung,
I shall have sung ! I shall have sung !

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